

NSC BRIEFING

18 January 1955

"STRAINS" IN SOVIET LEADERSHIP

I. "Straws in wind"--which are appearing with increasing frequency and which suggest that all is not "collective" in Soviet "collective leadership"--may indicate strains which potentially threaten the regime's stability.

A. Preferential publicity accorded Party First Secretary Khrushchev during past months clashes with spirit of "collective leadership".

B. Publicity reflects increasing role of Khrushchev in sponsoring policies on important problems confronting the regime. He, rather than Premier Malenkov, has made the official pronouncements on:

1. Soviet agricultural expansion, including "new lands" program and manpower allocated to program.
2. The lagging construction program.
3. The touchy subject of anti-religious activities.

C. Khrushchev also active in foreign affairs.

1. Attended Czech and Polish party congresses in '54.
2. Led unprecedentedly high-level delegation to Peiping.

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3. Shows no hesitation in entering discussions with diplomats and foreign visitors, even to disgruntlement of Foreign Minister Molotov. (Have been recent suggestions that other leaders dissatisfied with Molotov's foreign policy--particularly in preventing West German rearmament. In contrast to his earlier behavior Molotov himself has been described as "glacial" on these occasions when his fellow leaders were talking with Westerners on foreign affairs.)

D. Khrushchev also benefiting from synthetic history, which identifies him closely with hallowed leadership of past:

1. Press listings include Khrushchev among Lenin's "closest associates" during civil war period (untrue) and among prominent Central Committee members sent directly to war work during World War (true, but lists do not include Malenkov, whose record is same).
2. Is first Presidium member to boast of close and influential connections with Stalin. (7 January Komsomol meeting).
3. Was signer of Central Committee decree changing date of annual Lenin celebration (tends to

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associate Khrushchev in eyes of Soviet people both with new holiday and with revered leader).

E. Malenkov, in contrast, has made no major policy pronouncement since last Supreme Soviet session (April '54). Even on that occasion, Khrushchev got equal, or slightly preferential, treatment.

I. Malenkov's New Year answers to US News Agency's questions--only other time during '54 when he received individual publicity--noticeably played down by Soviet propaganda as compared with previous year.

II. Foreign observers in Moscow, who have seen leaders together, however, are unanimous in stating that Malenkov is top dog.

A. Attlee delegation last summer agreed Malenkov was "first among equals."

B. Following November Revolution celebration, Ambassador Bohlen commented: "two most important men. . . are Malenkov and Khrushchev, in that order."

C. French Ambassador Joxe, after talks with Soviet leaders (10 Dec '54), reported Malenkov controlled conversation throughout and was clearly "the patron."

III. Despite possible threat to "collective leadership" inherent in Khrushchev's rising prominence, preservation of "collective" probably still a priority interest of top

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leaders.

A. "Collective" has been successful, in past, in "regulating" conduct of Beria and--in less severe degree--conduct of Malenkov and Khrushchev, themselves.

1. Immediately after Stalin's death, Malenkov relinquished post as Party First Secretary and his propaganda was cut down.

2. As late as June '54, Khrushchev's propaganda buildup, which had reached peak, dropped sharply. Not resumed until Sept. '54.

B. "Collective" almost certainly still able to impose its will when necessary.

C. Good possibility that Khrushchev may again be forced to forego personal propaganda buildup.

IV. Need to remember some basic differences between present regime and Stalin's.

A. For instance, under Stalin, attempts at "empire building" by subordinates would be dealt with immediately.

B. In contrast, present regime seems willing to let such manifestations continue and perhaps correct themselves over a protracted period.

C. Thus dangerous for us to anticipate serious dislocations of Soviet government or Soviet policy-making on basis of these signs of maneuvering within leadership.